



## REGIONAL FOCUS: UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



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Photo: Bundesheer

After decades of steadily declining military expenditures a respective annual budget will be provided until 2020. **Page 29**

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# Fake News, Social Media, and Heavy Metal

As 2016 descended into the mists of time it became clear that some degree of “opinion engineering” had been going on. The sudden failures of opinion polls to get close to the final answer was simply a reflection of the fact that we had all become preoccupied with looking at our peers, our equals and our navels, and we were merely reinforcing this failure through our tweets, posts, comments and opinions on social media. The fact that we were in a minority was no longer recognized – by us. And the fact that in a functioning democracy the wishes of the majority are what counts? – Well, that no longer mattered either, other than for a little reverse schadenfreude.

The relevance of this for the global armoured vehicles industry, observers, military users and practitioners is two-fold. First; the distressing news about the new Russian armour and armaments, as flaunted on the T-15 ARMATA IFV, tilted the armoured vehicle balance wildly away from the West and re-informed everyone with an opinion about the Crimea and Ukraine – unless it was fake news. But of course, we can all tell the difference between real and fake – nyet?

Second, matter-of-fact statements in the mainstream media that the UK would select / had selected the BOXER 8x8 vehicle, and would use OCCAR to run the programme, hence avoiding any legal niceties such as a competitive tender – were really quite successful in creating the fait accompli that the originators wanted. Unhappily, a simple conversation reveals

that OCCAR has not even been approached about this, but the quivers running through the armoured vehicle community were very real – and the outrage on social media was, too: Perfidious Albion...

But has Perfidious Albion got it right? Many observers castigate the UK for having joined the programme and then left it again, thereby saving its own development silver until a propitious moment arrived, and leaving its former team-mates to carry the can, and the bill – until now? (The fact that the budget saved has been frittered away as per UK tradition is entirely irrelevant, of course.)

But the main result of the ARMATA unveiling was the new Western enthusiasm for heavier guns and heavier armour, drawing everyone away from the lightweight, protected 4x4 liaison and scout vehicles of yore and pushing everyone, and Uncle Tom Cobley, and the kitchen sink, into ever-larger, heavier, less tactical and more protected 8x8 vehicles. At some point, much like the wheeled MRAP families, modern 8x8, 30-tonne-plus vehicles are too big and have too many of the family jewels in them. Too many eggs in one basket, you might say. Are we there yet?



Stephen Barnard

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